Rome Scala Santa
9th December 1877

My dear Maria

I fear you may have been a little alarmed at my not writing sooner but I have been seriously engaged in writing about Keats for a new work of 3 letters & sketches of his attachments to a Lady, who received all these beautiful letters—

My memory has been fairly taxed & has just come up to the mark, the work is dedicated to me & so I was in duty to aid all I could on this account, added to which my regard for the memory of the poet & my joy at these 3 letters which I am told are for beauty beyond his poems

I am afraid that your ugly Winter has begun to make you all suffer as usual

do. that poor Tom is more content to
be in bed for the warmth & your with
your heavy weight of cloaths to keep
out the cold & the coals very dear are
causing you much uneasiness

I can give you rather a good account
of my poor self for the rheumatism has
nearly left & so I have only the feebleness
belonging to my great age which on the 7th
as you know was 85, but I am cheerful
& very comfortable with nursing myself
but I am rewarded for my care in being
so bobbish not because the surprise of every
one. Each 2d. day I go out with the Doctor
in a Cab & sometimes have 1/2 an hours walk
Our November was very fine but
now we are having heavy rains

A portrait of Keats, the size of life

I have just done successfully for every body asked me if I had a portrait of him

Great changes have taken place in Rome the King finding the idle Romans a bore has introduced a 100 thousand Lombards all hard working men & they are building a new city on the Romen waste grounds. some 800 houses have been built & the Romans are ashamed at lying & thieving, there are numerous robberies, but as I always go out in a cab with the Doctor I am not in danger

The Romans are building numerous large theatres on the hill having cheated the English for so many years, but now the English have created coming & the Romans are in a mess, there are upwards of 25 new theatres & nobody to occupy them - I was invited to an American lunch by my Doctor observes me it must have cost 15 a head !!

Rome is very dear & the Doctor would have a haunch of Venison on my birth day, it cost 15 Sh

and the Romans again in wonder for they thought their going would never cease — to give you an idea I was invited, after an American lunch (for I never go out to dinner) & I found that it cost 15 shillings a head!! Every thing is in the same proportion

Now the English go to Egypt to Cairo & Rome is fearfully quiet! — but I have no fear for I go out with my good Doctor in a cab every 2d day (he won't let me go out alone) & so get a walk of a mile or so in security & having nothing to do with the Romans

The cold is rather severe, 52 Fah & I feel it, but I warm my toes & then strut about my large room, but no longer get up at 6 for it is not light till past 7 & I do set down to breakfast at ½ p 8, dine at 1 & at ½ past 8 in the evening take supper, soup & boiled fruit, but never meats & so I sleep well & am really picking up & getting rid of all my pains — There now I have given you a long sheet with my love to all ever your loving brother Joe